

its astounding protective efficiency being attested by the readiness with which the Seri run through cactus thickets so thorny as to stop horses and dogs, or over conglomerated spall beds so sharp that even the light coyote leaves their trail. In the absence of measurements it may merely be noted that the hands and feet of the Seri are materially larger, not only absolutely but relatively to their stature, than those of neighboring tribesmen or even of Mexican and American workmen. And, on the whole, it may be said that in their proportions, as in their stature and color, the Seri are strikingly uniform, their range being less than that commonly observed in contemporary tribes, and the differences between them and their neighbors much exceeding the range among themselves. 142

Somatically distinctive as is the Seri at rest, he (or she) is much more so in motion—though the characteristics so readily caught by the eye are not easily analyzed and described. Perhaps the most conspicuous element in their walk is a peculiarly quick knee movement, bringing the foot upward and forward at the end of the stride; this merges into an equally quick thrust of the foot forward and downward, with toe well advanced, toward the beginning of the next stride; and these motions combine to produce a singular erectness and steadiness of carriage, the body moving in a nearly direct line with a minimum of lateral swaying or vertical oscillation, while the legs neither drag nor swing, but spurn the ground in successive strokes. Thus the walk seems notably easy and graceful, while the walker carries an air of alertness and reserve power, as if able to stop short at any point of a pace or to bolt forward or backward or sidewise with equal facility; he stimulates the "collected" animal whose feet tap the ground lightly and swiftly while his body appears to yield freely to voluntary impulse. In this deer-like or antelope-like movement all the Seri are much alike, and all are decidedly removed from their neighbors, even the light-footed Papago. The component motions are most conspicuous in leisurely walking, though the resultant movement is more striking in rapid walk or the incredibly swift run of youths and adults. The general movement is akin to that shaped by the habit of carrying burdens balanced on the head, as the Seri women actually carry their water ollas for astonishing distances; but the carriage is shared—indeed, best displayed—by the warriors and growing boys, who are not known to carry water in this way. 48/

Among the conspicuous but nondistinctive somatic characters of the Seri is luxuriant straight hair habitually worn long and loose. Commonly the hair is jet-black for most of the length, growing tawny toward the tips; sometimes it is black throughout, while again the tawny tinge, or perhaps a bleached appearance, extends well toward the scalp. Age-grayness seems not to be characteristic; the most aged matrons known have no more than a few inconspicuous and scattered gray hairs, though the pelage of some is slightly bleached or faded. None of the warriors at Costa Rica showed the slightest grayness except 142 [302] 142 145

[1898]

THE PEDESTRIAN HABIT

149*

blocks or metates, though it is manifest that most of the camps were fireless and many foodless. It is particularly noteworthy that even the more temporary resting-places are seldom if ever less than a mile or two from the nearest fresh water. In short, the Seri are not a domiciliary folk, but rather homeless wanderers, customarily roving from place to place, frequently if not commonly sleeping where overtaken by exhaustion or storm, ordinarily lumbering through a part of the day and watching by night, habitually avoiding fresh waters save in hurried and stealthy visits, and apparently gathering in their flimsy huts only on special occasions.

In conformity with their rovingness the Seri are notable burden-bearers. They habitually carry their entire stock of personal belongings (arms, implements, utensils, and bedding), as well as their stock of food and—weightiest burden of all—the water requisite for prolonged sustenance amid scorching deserts, in all their wanderings, the water being borne chiefly by women, in ollas, either balanced on the head singly or slung in pairs on rude yokes like those of Chinese coolies. And they have never grasped the idea of imposing their burdens on their bestial associates; their coyote-curs are not harnessed or even led; when they surround and capture horses, burros, and kine they make no use of ropes, never think of mounting even when pursued by vaqueros, but immediately break the necks or club out the brains of the beasts, perchance to tear the writhing body into quarters and flee for their lives with the reeking flesh still quivering on their sturdy heads and brawny shoulders—and scores of vaqueros agree in the affirmation (wholly incredible as it would be if supported by fewer witnesses) that even when so burdened the Seri skim the sand wastes of Desierto Encinas more rapidly than avenging horsemen can follow.

The hardly conceivable fleetness of the Seri is conformable with their habitual rovingness and their ability as burden-bearers; and this faculty is established by cumulative evidence so voluminous and consistent as to outweigh the presumption arising from the standards attained among other peoples. A few minutes after they were photographed, the group of boys shown in plate XVI, with several others of about the same size, provided themselves with a stock of their favorite human-hair cords, "rounded up" a dozen mongrel coyote-dogs haunting the rancharia at Costa Rica, and herded the unwilling animals toward a shrubbery-free space a quarter of a mile away, in order to rope them in imitation of the work of the Mexican cowboys earlier in the morning. From time to time as they went a frightened ear sneaked or broke through the cordon of boys, and made for distant shrub-tufts at top speed; yet in every case a boy darted from the ring, headed off the animal within one or two hundred yards, and lashed it back to its place. On arriving at their miniature rodeo the boys widened their ring, and at a signal scattered and frightened the dogs; then, when the fleeing animals had a fair start, each selected his victim and fol-

184*

THE SERI INDIANS

On putting the indi-

323
[462] cations together it would seem probable that the ware is made by the women, and that each piece is shaped from a lump of tempered and well-kneaded clay of suitable size, first hollowed and rudely shaped over one hand, and gradually expanded by spiral rubbing, kneading, and pressure between the hands of the maker. The burning is incomplete and variable, suggesting a little outdoor fire in a shallow pit adapted to a single vessel. The ware is without glaze or slip or other surficial treatment save that the lamellar texture is best developed toward the surfaces; hence it is so porous that the filled vessel is moist even in the sun.

482
[462] Ordinarily women are the water-bearers, each carrying an olla

balanced on the head with the aid of a slightly elastic annular cushion, usually fashioned of yucca fiber (plate XXXII and figure 15), though in some cases two ollas are slung in nets at the ends of a yoke (figure 16) after the



FIG. 15.—Seri olla ring.

Chinese coolie fashion (this device being apparently accultural).

415 The function of the conventional Seri olla is exclusively that of a canteen or water-carrying vessel, and its form is suited to no other use; while its lines, like its thinness of wall, are adapted to the stresses of internal and external pressure in such wise as to give maximum strength with minimum weight. It is by reason of this remarkably delicate adaptation of materials to purposes that the plain olla figured in plate XXXIII, weighing an ounce or two more than 10 pounds in dry air, holds and safely carries three and one-third times its weight of water. When such ollas are broken, the larger pieces may be used as cups or

[WTH. 489. 17]



FIG. 16.—Water bearer's yoke.

[171]

THE KILT AND WAMMUS

225*

and XIX; the birdskin kilt (put on for the purpose) is illustrated in plate XVIII, while the aboriginal fabric is fairly represented in plate XXIX. Although ordinarily worn as a kilt, the same article (temporarily replaced by an improvised substitute) serves other purposes at the convenience of the wearer; in the chase for tunas and for moving game it becomes a bag or pack-sheet; in case of cold rain it is shifted to the shoulders or the exposed side; during the siesta it is elevated on a shrub and a stick to serve as a canopy; at sleeping time generally it forms (especially when of birdskin) a bed, i. e., a combined mattress and coverlet; and in attack or defense the pelican skin is at once standard, buckler, and waving cap to confuse quarry or enemy after the manner of the tressor's cloak. [171] [172] [173]

An almost equally distinctive garment is a short shirt or wammus, with long sleeves, worn by men and women but not by children; ordinarily it covers the thorax, missing connection with the kilt by a few inches, and so affording ventilation and space for suckling the terming offspring. Unlike the kilt, it is an actual garment, fitted with sleeves and fastened in front with hair-cord strings. Although the Seri wammus corresponds fairly with a Yaqui garment, it seems practically certain that it is of local aboriginal design, and that it was made primitively of haircloth or native textiles (as illustrated in plate XXIX) and worn rather ceremoniously; but latterly it is made of manta and is worn habitually (at least by the women and on the frontier), though cast aside in preparation for any special task or effort—i. e., it is not connected with pudency-sense, save to a slight degree in the younger women. The form, function, and prevalence of the wammus are illustrated by the group shown in plate XIII, in which nearly all of the thirty-odd adults wear the garment. [171] [172]

These two articles constitute the ordinary wearing apparel of the Seri, though they are commonly supplemented (especially when both are of manta) by a pelican-skin robe, which is habitually carried to serve as bed or Mackintosh, according to the chance of journey and weather, or as a shield in sudden warfare. No head-covering is used, save in the ceremonial masquerade, when the heads of animals are worn as masks, or in aping Caucasian customs, especially on expeditions for barter (as illustrated in plate XII). Loose trousers of Mexican pattern are sometimes put on at frontier points, but are discarded in Seriland proper, save by Mashém, who maintains prestige partly by this borrowed badge of Caucasian superiority. Leggings and moccasins are eschewed, naturally enough, since they would afford little protection from the sharp spalls and savage thorns of the district, and would give lodgment for the barbed spines inevitably gathered in rapid chase or flight over cactus-dotted stretches; and the only foot-covering seen (save Mashém's boots) was a single sandal made from the rough skin of a turtle-flipper, apparently for ceremonial rather than practical use. [171]

* Hardy (Exuvia, p. 286) describes the ceremonial wearing of the heads of deer with horns attached.

524 Dice are three splints of cane; tapering toward both ends, nearly flat. The concave inside is greenish white, the outside darker. The count is: 0 insides up, win 4; 1 inside up, win 1; 2 insides up, lose 1 and play; 3 insides up, lose 4. The 3 splints are stacked together, then thrown endwise against the palm, a piece of turtle shell, or anything similar, so as to fly forward and scatter on the ground. (Some players probably acquire a degree of skill in making the canes fall right.) A player repeats until he throws 2 whites or insides. For points scored, he draws lines on the ground in front of himself. His opponent erases his lines as he wins, or adds to them as he loses, until he himself is ahead, when he begins to mark his own lines. Ten points wins the game. A stick is then set in the ground by the winner, who goes on playing the next game. That is, if he has 8, and throws 4, he sets up his stick, erases 6 lines so as to start the new game with a credit of 2, and throws again. The Seri perform these additions and subtractions with the rapidity of a practiced white man.

A ring of people may play at once. Their scoring in relation to one another was not ascertained, but it is presumably each from his neighbor, with the totals shown by sticks.

Since with fair throws the losses in this game must equal gains, a lead of 10 over an opponent is as much as could expectably be played for if the game were not to be unduly protracted.

526 Football race is played with *palo fierro* balls, perhaps 3 inches in diameter, one to each side of 4 runners. The ball may be moved only with the foot. The race is along the beach, where cactus and brush do not interfere. The distance, according to places named to Sr. Thomson and known to him, is about 6 miles. The men on a side relieve each other in informal relays; usually only 1 or 2 finish. The Seri once went north to play the Papago this game, but lost.

[648]

Shimmy is a woman's game, preliminary to the football race. Four women to a side carry sticks with which they try to throw an 8-12 inch hoop to a goal mark at the end of a short field. Behind each side stand the 4 men runners who are to race with a ball.

Notes on Material Culture

• 482

Women carry loads on their heads with a ring; men with the *pén*, Spanish *pulanca* or lever, a stick over the shoulder, with load hung from each end. These are the usual Sonora and Sinaloa Indian ways of carrying.

[177]

516

The Seri sit and lounge randomly. The men squat, occasionally cross the legs, put them sideways, or sit with one knee up. The women wear long cloth skirts, but apparently sit just as variously.

714

Body armor, *naitlanika p*, with sleeves and helmet, and a shield, *saXe'tiX*, both of hide, were worn. The shield was described as 4 or 5 feet high, roof-shaped toward the front. It is not clear whether

McGEE ON THE SERI

114 The pages that follow deal with McGee's well-known monograph
[128] on the Seri,¹ discussing first points on which his data are fuller or
mine confirm or modify his, and then points on which I believe him
to have been in error or to have misconstrued his observations.
McGee spent little more time in actual contact with the Seri than I
did.² His work impresses me as that of an extraordinarily good ob-
server, keen in seeing significant evidence, but of uncontrolled imagi-
nation and unconscious of his preconceptions. It is only fair to state
that where he founds an interpretation on slender or uncertain data,
he generally indicates the fact to a careful reader.

Data and Discussion

114 The ratio of kilogram weight to liter capacity of water jars is
415 given by McGee (p. 183) as follows: 2 Seri, .126-.147; 2 Papago,
239-.279; 4 modern Pueblo, .252-.295. There is no doubt that the
Seri olla is unusually thin-walled. Sherds seen at a campsite near
San Rafael, on the dry course of the Bacuachi, 20 or more miles
from the coast, ran from 2 to 5.5 millimeters in thickness, averaging
3.8; their curvature was slight, indicating large vessels. McGee
remarks (p. 184) that the purpose of nearly all Seri pottery is to
hold or transport water, other uses being secondary, generally after
breakage. My observations on the island confirm this.

114 Head loads are carried on a ring of "yucca" fiber (p. 184).

462 The carrying stick or yoke, with nets to hold ollas, is considered
accultural³ by McGee (p. 184), although he mentions (p. 68) that
Ugarte in 1721 saw the device in use by men, the women carrying
single ollas, presumably on their heads. Nordenskiöld has recently
shown the "coolie yoke" to be ancient in the area.⁴ It is used today
in Sinaloa and Sonora.

114 McGee (pp. 11, 191, 292) thought that he understood that the
773 "Ancient of Pelicans" was the chief creative deity and brought up
the islands and earth with the help of the Turtle or Shark. This

¹ W. J. McGee, *The Seri Indians*, BAE-R 17, part 1, pp. 1-128, 129*-644*, 1898. (In citations of the higher page numbers, the asterisk is omitted.)

² McGee (pp. 12, 98, 281) in 1894 spent "about a week" at Costa Rica west of Hermosillo where some 80 Seri were temporarily concentrated, his principal informants being sub-chief Mashem who spoke Spanish, and Juan Maria. A Spanish-English interpreter is referred to. In 1898 the coast and Tibouron Island were visited, camps examined, but not a single Seri encountered. The vocabulary was obtained chiefly at Hermosillo from Kaban, an old Seri official interpreter who had left the island in childhood, never revisited it, considered himself an outlaw in Seri eyes, and had long had no dealings with them except under Mexican protection. I spent six days or parts of days with Seri, sleeping two nights on Punta San Miguel and three in the rancherías on the island opposite. Two Seri accompanied us back to Hermosillo to draw their government stipends, and were available for some supplementary questioning and revision of notes on the two following days.

³ *Comparative Ethnographical Studies*, No. 2, 251, 1906.

614 hundred Seris at a time. They lived in maternal groups or clans in which the elder females were of great prominence in the management of everyday affairs. When, in the wanderings of a family a new camp was decided upon, the elder matron usually [462] erected the jacal alone, without the aid of men or boys, gathering the long poles of the ocotillo or the branches of desert trees and fashioning them into an arched framework over which a covering of brush, and often later of turtle shells, served to give protection from the desert sun. After the household was prepared, she took her place within easy reach of the meager and squalid family possessions, and around this nucleus other matrons and their children gathered in the course of a day or two. It was usually three or four days, and sometimes a week, before the brothers and husbands came wandering in from their roving search for food to take their places at the new camp site.

482 From the turtle fishing camps on the chan-
312 nel, the nearest fresh water was at a distance

[p. 196(A)]

312 of four miles by a rough and stony trail. In
 482 other parts of the island, habitations were
 occupied as distant as 15 miles from the
 nearest watering places. Under these con-
 ditions the Seris became essentially and pri-
 marily water carriers, and all their other in-
 dustries were subordinated to this function.
 [271] They learned to economize on water carry-
 ing by gulping incredible quantities on their
 occasional visits to the aguajes, yet, more
 than half of the water required in their vital
 economy was consumed after transportation
 over distances of four to twelve miles. The
 312 women were ordinarily the water bearers and
 for this important business manufactured a
 482 distinctive vessel for the purpose. From fine
 323 adobe clay they hollowed, expanded and
 shaped by manipulation with the fingers and
 without the aid of implements of any sort,
 a large olla of remarkably light weight in
 proportion to its capacity. Its mouth was
 made no larger than the hand that shaped it,
 482 thus to prevent spilling on the trail. From
 yucca fiber a cylindrical cushion was also

[p. 196(B)]

[text continues on p. 197(B)]

- 482 fashioned to fit the head (Fig. 7) and to aid in balancing the forty- to fifty-pound water-filled olla as it was carried over the rough and hilly trails from aguaje to jacal. (It is not certain whether the use of the shoulder pole, or palanca, was a part of original Seri culture, but in more recent times two water vessels were frequently carried, hung from either end of the notched pole.)

396
[462] While the tasks of supplying water and of manufacturing the vessels used in its transport were generally delegated to the women and children of the household, the building of the balsa was an undertaking that required the co-operation of the entire group. The carrizo canes were first gathered by the women and boys from the patches growing about the few permanent fresh waters of Seriland (Fig. 4). The leaves and tassels of the canes were removed by hand and the canes tied in bundles for carrying to the shore. There the men proceeded to lay, overlap, interlace and bind the canes into a larger and larger cylindrical bundle, tapering at

[p. 197(B)]

482



FIG. 7. CARRYING WATER FROM A DESERT AGUAJE

281

342



FIG. 8. STRETCHING AND DRYING THE PELICAN SKIN BORE

[p. 198(A)]

[142]
 [291]
 [482]
 [854]



[231]
 [853]

FIG. 12. SERI MOTHER AND BABE
 SERI MOTHERS COMMONLY HAVE TOO MUCH MILK AND
 FREQUENTLY RELIEVE THEMSELVES BY SUCKLING AN
 ORPHANED PUPPY OR SOMETIMES EVEN A BASTY PIG.

302
 386
 614

302
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ing, and were carried in cane tubes. The
 paints were carefully prepared, applied, and
 preserved, and, as indispensable feminine
 accompaniments even on the longest jour-
 neys, were among the most highly prized of
 the people's possessions. The importance of
 the face-painting custom, established in the
 old tribal life, remained strong even as the
 slaughter of the warring tribe progressed

[p. 201(B)]

114
648
[123] their habits and to live among them without undue fear of losing his life. Through the kindness of Señor Thomson the senior author succeeded in making himself a friend of the Seri and, enlarging upon this friendship through long periods of living and traveling among them, has acquired an intimate knowledge of these strange people.

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[161] In 1922 the fishing industry of the Gulf of California was not yet well developed, and it was to be ten years before the village of Kino should appear on the maps of the Sonora coast. The Seris were still isolated in their desert domain and their numbers, then about 250, were maintaining themselves out of reach of the infectious diseases of the white man. The clan life had disappeared, and the people lived as a single tribe with their old chief, Juan Tomas, 90 years old at that time

[291]
[481]
[482]
[415]



FIG. 15. MOVING DAY AMONG THE SERIS
THESE BUNDLES, BORNE FOR MANY MILES OVER ROCKS,
THROUGH CACTUS AND DEEP SAND, CONTAIN UTENSILS
FOR HOUSEKEEPING WHEREVER THE SERIS MAY STOP.

[p.263(B)]

105 and a veteran of nearly a century of warfare
178 against the soldiers of Sonora. The turtle
remained their most important source of
food, and the pitahaya harvest the most en-
joyed. The crafts of their old culture were
largely gone, however. Hoop-iron had come
in for many uses: harpoon points, scrapers,
and knives. The bow and arrow had been
almost entirely supplanted by rifles of which
the tribe possessed more than thirty. The
handmade clla was fast disappearing in
favor of the five-gallon tin can, and water
[482] carrying, now much done by the males, was
accomplished by means of a palanca, borne

on the heavily calloused shoulder, to which
a can was suspended from each end.

178 It seemed that the balsa building art was
396 encountered barely as it passed into extinc-
[126] tion, for the last balsa known to have been
made by the Seris was found in use near
Kino, in 1922. This rare prize was immedi-
ately bargained for and in exchange it was
agreed that the tribesman should have lum-
ber to build a boat large enough for all the
people of his family. A few months later the
finished craft, caulked with a "pitch" made

[p. 264 (A)]

313
482



FIG. 20. SERI WOMEN BEARING FIRE WOOD TO THE CAMP AT KINO

137



FIG. 21. A MEXICAN TOTUAVA CATCH ON THE BEACH AT KINO

[p.267(A)]

396 ingenuity of a modern shipbuilder to have constructed a boat. These simple, desert people, however, through centuries of struggle for life in their desolate realm had learned to use every natural material available to them, however laborious the tasks and inefficient the products. The carrizal reed, [824] *Phragmites communis*, grows about the few permanent water holes of Seri-land, and from countless numbers of these slender, buoyant canes they built their watercraft. The reeds were stripped of leaves and gathered in long bundles, bound together and gradually augmented by more and more inter-laced canes until a bundle 18 to 30 feet long and $1\frac{1}{2}$ feet in diameter, tapering at both ends, was made. Three of these were then bound together with cords of fiber or human hair, making a maneuverable one or two man raft, easily transported to the shores.

283 The mesquite tree, *Prosopis juliflora*, provided fiber for cords. The flexi-
[824] ble outer tissues of the roots were stripped off, soaked and progressively pounded, split and worked between hand and mouth until very slender, fibrous threads were obtained which were then twisted into cords. In some
[824] cases a coarse, rough fabric was woven from these fibers, but most garments were made of pelican skins. The strips of workable mesquite root or some-
times yucca fiber were also used in making doughnut-shaped head pads which aided in balancing the capacious earthen water jars as they were
[824] carried on the heads of the women over rough and stony trails from water hole to camp site.

262 While occupying the turtle fishing camps on El Infernillo during the good
824 season, vegetable supplements to the fishy diet were few. Every nourishing seed or woody fruit yielded by the desert was carefully gathered; even the tiny seeds of the sea grass, *Ruppia*, were sorted from beach drift and made
[824] into meal. Never did the Seris learn to cultivate any crop or domesticate any animals other than the half wild coyote dogs that lived in mutual toleration
[824] with them. Even had they done so, their success in the barren, waterless land would have been small.

222 Sterile as is the Seri's hinterland, for a time each summer the thorny
262 plants with which it is so profusely stocked ripen an abundant crop of fruit. The cacti in particular yield a wonderful harvest of luscious and succulent fruits, and toward this fortuitous supply the Seris were accustomed to move in June and July. The foothills of Sierra Seri on the mainland are adorned with great numbers of giant cacti, *Pachycereus Pringlei*, *Carnegiea gigantea*
[824] and *Lemaireocereus Thurberi* from which the luscious pitahayas were readily knocked down when ripe. The Indians wandered into the cactus forest and after a simple ritual marking the beginning of the feast, proceeded to gorge themselves for weeks on the succulent fruit until waning supply and cloying appetite drove them back to more severe food-getting activity by the sea. They did not customarily find it necessary to leave the cactus forest,
252 however, as soon as the supply of fruits was no longer sufficient, for by the
262 time the fruiting season was ended they had provided themselves with a
514 second harvest. The pitahayas, gorged in such tremendous quantity throughout the season, were very imperfectly digested; the miriads of hard seeds, particularly, passed through the system unchanged and with the preservation of these in mind the Indians carefully collected with the aid of large sea shells all such seedy discharges and let them dry in the desert sun. Thus,
252 as the supply of fresh fruit faded they proceeded to the use of this hoard

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Preparing a mesquite bean meal cake on the stone metate.

Seri women carrying firewood back to camp. Note the baskets and the head pads made of mesquite or torote.

123 handed to show their friendliness.

142 One was a young man with rather pleasant features, his braided
291 hair hanging below his shoulders. His name was Antonio Herrera. The
123 other was a wild-looking specimen called Ramon Blanco. His hair was a
(302) tangled mat with a short braid behind, suspicious black piercing eyes,
(311) long sparse moustache and chin-beard hiding a broad cruel mouth. He
wore the remnants of an old sweater, a short dirty kilt, or skirt,
nearly to his knees, a belt full of cartridges, mostly empty, and a
long knife in a rawhide scabbard.

123 The young man had been baptized and given a name by Roberto, who
(176) had acted as godfather or *patrono*, many years ago. He wore a hat,
(219) jacket, and pants of blue denim, and *guaraches*, or sandals of rawhide.

We shook hands all around and then they called and halloed in the
brush and soon three women and a lot of children, wild and half-
(415) clothed, filed into camp. The women were tall, gaunt, unkempt, ragged
(422) and barefooted, paying us not the slightest notice. They were bearing
(422) on their heads large baskets filled with all their earthly posses-
(231) sions---cooking ollas, scraps of cloth, pieces of turtle meat, bone
brads, hair brushes, and odds and ends. They carried, also, an infant
or two wrapped in odd bits of rags. Several gaunt dogs followed in
their wake.

342 In all, three families came trailing in, removed their household
equipment from their heads and resumed their interrupted and primitive
(512) housekeeping. Each family occupied its apartment in the row of brush
shelters, separated from each other only by brush partitions with a
total lack of privacy. These shelters, always open to the sea, serve
as shade from the fierce rays of the sun, and also as windbreaks, but
(561) are no protection from infrequent rains. They are occupied only for a
brief period and then their nomadic tenants move on to fresh *cahuas*,
or sea turtle range.

123 Soon, a third man arrived while we were near the huts, Manuel
(142) Encina. He was a man of sixty-five, gray hair and mustache, seamed
features, and not evil looking. He was out of breath. He had gone for
water to the same water hole where we had been yesterday, struck our
tracks, had left his water cans and hurried back to warn his people.
He was greatly relieved to find friends.

Since he had gone for water, inquiry revealed there had been no
water in camp for two days, and six adults and one girl of thirteen
and six children were thirsty. We gladly gave them one of our five-
gallon cans of water and they were very grateful. They had caught a
(225) sea turtle the day before and gave us some turtle steaks which looked
(262) like beef or mutton.

312 As the camp was without water and we were running short, the young
402 man and Encina offered to get some. Each took a *palanca*, or short
123 shoulder pole with knotted ends, fitted empty five-gallon cans in

123 nets of twisted fiber, hooked the nets in the ends of the notched
312 stick and started off nine or ten miles to the water hole in the heart
[482] of the mountains.

Water carried so far over loose, sandy soil, dodging cactus, threading a devious way among the talus thrown off the cliffs and slopes of canyon walls, with the water-bearer barefoot, acquires a value absolutely unknown to the man who draws an unlimited supply from a faucet.

The two men were gone six hours and when they returned they were almost staggering under the heavy loads of water, each man carrying at least one hundred and ten pounds of water, as the cans were full. In addition, one man had a canteen full.

The thirsty people drank sparingly, and a little Seri maid poured some of the precious liquid into a cooking olla for a thirsty dog. After the dog had lapped sufficient to allay his thirst, she carefully poured the residue back into the can, never losing a drop. One drop of water could not be spared after that arduous trip.

484 Bob says a man goes to Hermosillo occasionally and returns to the
147 coast, ninety miles, with two to five cans of mesquite. It takes probably
648 four days to do it, but it is a wonderful feat of endurance. He said about thirty years ago a woman walked the ninety miles during one night, afoot, and reported to the Government House when it was opened at nine in the morning that about fifty of her people had been shot by Roberto's uncle at various times. This uncle was a very hard rough man and the Seris were fond of his mares and steers for meat, and used to steal, so he began shooting a goodly number. Fearing a man messenger would be shot, as men were frequently shot while going along the road, they sent a woman.

Ysabel was Governor at the time. Judgment was rendered against the uncle, and it is probable that a hanging squad would have been sent out to execute him. The Governor, a great friend of the family, sent for him, and he rode ninety miles at night on horseback and was saved with the Governor's help.

Roberto saw twelve Seris pack meat from two mares, two steers and two yearling heifers, for four or five miles to their boats. Their endurance and strength is phenomenal. The question naturally arises, "Why are not burros used by the Seris on the Island to ride and pack, as they are by their Mexican neighbors on the mainland?" It has been
[492] tried, but things were reversed; the Seris packed the burros around in their stomachs.

261 Roberto said: "These people, living on the verge of starvation,
262 never having a continuous food supply, would kill and eat every burro, and it is a common thing on the mainland, if a cow or horse dies, and Seris are in the neighborhood, they will try to beat the buzzards to it. They will gorge in times of plenty, and when food is scarce they

[Text continues on p. 160]

10: Davis E-5 (1922-ca.1939) 1965

NU31 Seri NU31

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Carrying firewood

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Seri basket maker - 1934

535 semi-darkness.

123

Soon two little boys joined the dance, stepping up and down in the sand. Lighted only by the flickering flames of the driftwood fires on the shores of this mysterious and dreaded isle, the soft murmur of the sea as a refrain to the wild chanting, the weird circling of glittering eyes, and wild dark faces, presented a scene of uncanny and savage fascination witnessed by white men probably for the first time.

[533] After each stanza there was a short rest. The singing was similar to most other tribal chanting.

582

Bob made the remark that the girl was old enough to be broken in by the old Chief. I said, "How?"

622

He said, when a girl thirteen or fourteen has her menses, the Chief takes her and goes through the family act. This is called 'breaking her in'. She is then eligible for marriage. A young man desiring marriage has to purchase the girl by giving the father a boat or rifle, both being necessary to the Seri's existence and protection. At the wedding they have sort of a fiesta and much mescal is drunk, which properly solemnizes a wedding.

585

When a girl has a baby it usually comes very naturally and easily, but I remember one girl's first baby was three days in coming, and she suffered a great deal. This was on a subsequent trip. She was staying with many of her people on the mainland and someone asked them if they didn't want a doctor or other help. They said: No, they had one. It was a Medicine Man who chanted over the girl and dug hollows in the sand to fit her heels into. He said that the legs had to be kept apart. This was all he did. But ordinarily there is no trouble, and if a baby is born at noon the mother is up and doing, and cooks supper for her lord and master. The men treat their wives with kindness and each shares with the other any delicacy.

[543]

In Seriland domestic duties are reversed from the usual Indian methods. The men get the water and the women get the wood. This consists mostly of driftwood gathered along the shore, and it is a picturesque sight to see a string of women and girls bringing in loads of wood in baskets on their heads at sunset.

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[313]

(482)

There are no plural marriages, but sometimes when a Chief is old, or rather when his wife is old and can have no more babies, he can take a younger woman as his wife. The present Chief is getting old now, almost too old to break in the girls, so they may get a younger man. This might be called the perquisites of office. He takes the cream.

622

595

They hunt lice in the head and eat them. This is said to increase the amorous desires. The penis of the male turtle is cut out and dried. This is pounded and pulverized and placed in the food of the women. This is said to create a desire for a man and the family act.

932

825

123 It was a beautiful morning in early May, and the water was still
[202] as a pond, reflecting all the sunrise tints like a mirror. After a
breakfast of clams and broth, bread and sand and bronco tea, we made
a big smoke and were answered by a similar smoke two miles off, so we
knew our friends were on the way.

123 In one hour they began trailing in, the women each with a load on
her head, walking graceful and erect. On one head was an inverted
• 412 turtle shell containing nearly all the family belongings done up in
[412] rags. On the top was the most precious belonging of all---the rifle.
The man carried two or three ollas and other things on a shoulder
stick. Everything necessary for their home was carried on their
heads.

123 Soon the Indian Blanco was seen paddling in his balsa; he also
had a load and had paddled all the way from Ironwood camp against
wind and sometimes tide. As they were all very thirsty we gave them
water around. They immediately went to the shore as it was low tide,
and began gathering small oysters from the rocks. Soon each woman
returned with a half bushel of them on her head.

About three o'clock and for an hour or so thereafter, Antonio
Herrera, the Chief's son Chico, the old Chief Juan Tomas, two other
men and one woman, came drifting into camp with their dogs. Each one
was loaded with things. They were a pretty wild looking bunch. There
was very little food and little water for so many.

648 The Chief said that a day or two before, some of his men had a
731 fight with some sailors (Mexicans) on the Island of San Estevan four
or five miles off the south west corner of Tiburon. Nobody was killed,
but the two boats, the wealth of the Island, had drifted away and
were lost, leaving eight men marooned on the Island. They had gone
there to gather mesquite to make drink to celebrate a wedding to come
off soon. Three men were five days without water. They sent up frantic
smoke signals every day. At last they were seen, and help went for
them in the only remaining boat on the Island. They were rescued.

648 The Chief and his men and women, with us, are going to Hermosillo
484 ninety miles afoot with all their belongings to ask the Government
123 for food and help.

142 The Chief looks to be seventy years old, a grim dark-skinned in-
[222] dividual with a thin fringe of hair on his upper lip, broad nose,
wide nostrils, small black eyes. He is well-built and erect. None of
these that I have seen so far have any fat. They are lean and sinewy.
[302] The young men are of large build, high cheek bones, some with hair on
[291] their lips, their long black hair braided; sometimes with a strand of
red worsted. All were either barefooted or wore sandals. I saw one
pair of sandals made out of turtle hide; another of burro hide.

648 When the Chief arrived, the sail of a vessel was seen over the
123 beach. Bob recognized it as belonging to a launch of a Yaqui Indian

[Text continues on p 180]

123 gunwales, and then in trying to balance, she would dip the other way.

As we got to the point, the swells were larger and the danger so imminent we stopped the boat in lee of the point nearest Sonora, and Bob and I landed.

Old Blanco had paddled his balsa with some of the freight to the Sonora side. The boat put off again, and rode the sea better and it landed all right on Sonora side. In the meantime, several of the women and children, with their loads, had reached the Seri point ready to be ferried across. The boat returned with two Seris paddling. We loaded a lot of Indian junk, Bob and I and several children, the Chief and a woman. Nine in all. We reached the Sonora side, all right.

By this time breakfast had been cooked and we sat down to drink black coffee and eat rice and onions. The wild-looking Seris sat around us watching each mouthful, hungrily. When we finished we gave them all that was left and they cleaned it up.

[231] As we left the Seri point, and as their masters left, the dogs trotted to the water's edge and howled. Bob said that when all had crossed, the dogs would plunge in and swim across the swift current.

[134] The water was infested with sharks, so it was possible that some of them would not reach shore. At last everybody got across, dogs and all.

• [112] The Indians carried their packs; the men with the shoulder sticks and the women balancing their loads with marvelous dexterity on their heads. Two men packed twenty gallons of water in five-gallon cans.

When we had all our things in the boat, Juan Tomas jumped in with his pack. We were well loaded before, but this made us a little too deeply laden. Nevertheless, we pushed off and raised the sail to take advantage of the wind. We sailed parallel to the shore for a few miles until the waves got too overpowering and the boat had a lot of water in her. The mast was unstepped---a very delicate operation---and we made for the shore after shipping some of the waves.

My heart was in my mouth most of the time as each time the boat rolled, one side almost dipped up a wave. It was a matter of personal safety as well as safety of what few things I had already collected. One olla I had bought was smashed. The waves looked like clear green paint.

We finally landed without mishap and pulled the boat up, but it was so rocky we had great difficulty in walking in our bare feet. Our legs and feet were bare when we were in the boat and mine were badly scalded by the sun.

The Seris had made camp one quarter of a mile down the beach from us, and the old Chief shouldered his pack and strode down to them. We were very thankful.

[225] Soon some of the men came back to borrow the boat to hunt for

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*Santo Blanco and Edward H. Davis -
this hunter gambled away his only
shirt - Sumatra - 1929*



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Seri method of carrying infant

